

## In the Making of a Free Society

Joe Szymanski | Support this author on Patreon | June 14th, 2014

As a society, it is in our best interest to create a just peace. This is something, however, that goes unfulfilled throughout the world. Many would think that inheriting this tranquil state might be a simple endeavor, if only certain barriers did not keep it from happening. Just imagining how to create peace is the easy part; it is overcoming those barriers that challenge one's ability to put forth their implementations. Peace is not something we wait for, but an objective that must be won through direct action and cooperation. By direct action I mean people should unflinchingly take on a problem by the use of their skills and openness to put an end to that problem; and by cooperation I mean people should take on that problem together. Earlier this year, I volunteered at the Western Maryland Food Bank; while there, I witnessed cooperation like I had never seen before. People donate money and food, while the food bank gives it away to organizations in need at a very low cost. I strongly believe we have it in our power to create more organizations of this sort, without the threat of scarcity or coercion.

Upon arriving at the food bank, I did not know what to expect since I had never volunteered in this manner before. There are two large garage doors on the front of the building; I entered through a side door that led to the office. There I shook hands with Wes, who runs the warehouse. He led me to the warehouse which has an upper-deck where customers look at assorted items and choose what they want – there are no limits. The lower-deck consisted of many large shelves full of food items. The first thing Wes had me do was put packages of cans in a pile below shelves of other food. The work I performed was mainly heavy-lifting, including moving boxes of food around the facility and helping customers load their vehicles. I would also help sort items and put them in their proper places. The operation of the food bank runs very smoothly. Customers would come in and pick out which items they need, running at nineteen cents per pound, and place them on a skid. After they were finished, the skid was transported to a ledge and taken off of the skid. The customers would back in through one of the garage doors and pull up to the ledge. From the ledge, other volunteers and I would help load these items into the backs of their vehicles.

After helping a few customers, Wes came up to me and explained exactly what the food bank does; it sells food items to organizations and charities, such as food pantries (including church-based), the Women's shelter, Teen Challenge and even day care centers. The food bank takes in food donated by food-drives and the general good will of people. While volunteering I noticed that a few times the staff was preparing to have a food-drive at certain places. They also take in items from grocery and convenience stores that are some-what damaged (such as a few cracked eggs) or close to expiring. Their official mission statement reads,

The Western Maryland Food Bank, Inc. is committed to reducing hunger by acquiring and distributing food and non-food items to local and regional organizations assisting those in need.

Now that I have described the operations of a food bank, let us see some statistics on worldwide hunger and poverty. In the world today, a recorded 842 million people do not have enough food to eat. About 827 million of those people live in developing countries and poor nutrition causes about forty-five percent of deaths in children under age five. In 2012, about 46.5 million U.S. citizens lived in poverty; 49 million lived in food insecure households, 15.9 million of them children. With a world population of about seven billion, 842 million people may not seem like a lot. But roughly imagine the combined populations of the United States, Indonesia, Russia, France, the United Kingdom, and Sweden without enough food to eat, while the rest of the world is living the good life. It always sounds much more shocking when describing statistics according to entire populations because, although more prevalent in developing countries, hunger occurs all over the world. It is much more camouflaged by the well-off when in developed countries because, if that is not the reality of the majority, then why show what only a minority go through?

I chose to volunteer at a food bank because I wanted to work within a place that deals with the issue of hunger, one of the most common and profound forms of violence. Hunger is an issue that is largely neglected by those in charge because they feel as though they have far more important priorities than making sure people, especially children, are not going hungry. Although most food banks receive government funding, they provide a good model of voluntary cooperation in order to help the needy. We cannot and must not wait for the state to "help" us. We must take care of ourselves and each other. Mutual aid is a simple way to help people overcome poverty in a peaceful manner. We must build our own facilities, such as food banks, and resources so that this may be possible and not let anyone tell us that it cannot be done.

Many conformists may see this as idealistic, and me an ideologue, but I see it as absolutely natural and desirable. Hunger is something that can lead people to commit acts of criminality out of desperation, such as theft or physical violence. A lot of people damn those who commit these acts, but many of them are put into a situation, such as poverty, where they are out of options. Poverty is, without a doubt, a cause of crime. Some may see certain people as inherently ugly, while I see them as beautiful individuals who are begging to be set free from whatever coercive powers are keeping them bound. I sincerely believe that peace is an absolute kept from truly coming into existence. No matter who I am speaking to, a brother, sister, friend, comrade, it is intrinsic that we knock down those barriers that keep peace from emerging and a free society from flourishing.